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ABSTRACT

Recently, the traditional school structure has been harshly scrutinized for several key defects, including bureaucratic rules and regulations, professional isolation of teaching staff, evaluation systems irrelevant to instructional improvement, low teacher participation in decision making, and noncooperation between teachers and administrators. This article surveys a variety of new structures categorized under school improvement and professional development that demand teamwork and creation of a school community where the faculty works together on common goals. Many of these programs have already been implemented, and none is a radical departure from traditional school organization. School improvement as a community responsibility involves "lead teachers" guiding and influencing others' activity, collaborative teacher-administrator improvement teams, and teacher evaluation of education programs. Teachers assuming responsibility for their own professional development need a collegial atmosphere in which to improve their skills. Among the available development programs are peer observation, peer coaching, on-the-job training, teacher centers with expert teachers, mentor programs, and teacher support teams. Key factors in all these new structures are mutual respect and cooperation between teachers and administrators. Appended are 11 references. (MLH)

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Oregon School Study Council/University of Oregon/Eugene, OR/Vol. 27, No 1–Fall 1986

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OSSC REPORT

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New Structures Build Collaboration among Teachers and Administrators

by Stuart C. Smith
Editor, OSSC

Perhaps more than ever before, the traditional school structure is being subjected to harsh scrutiny. During the past year, reports issued by the California Commission on the Teaching Profession, the Holmes Group, and the Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession have drawn attention to several key defects in the typical school's structure: overreliance on bureaucratic rules and regulations, school environments that isolate teachers, evaluation systems that are irrelevant to instructional improvement, lack of teacher involvement in the decision-making process, and obstacles to cooperation between teachers and administrators. Propelled by these reports, a rare consensus embracing teacher and administrator organizations, researchers, and friends of education in the business world is gaining momentum toward major reform of school structures.

While it has become fashionable to criticize the traditional structure, too little attention has been given to alternatives. Do better ways of organizing the work environment of teachers exist? And if so, do they work? This article surveys a variety of new structures, most of them already implemented in schools, that command positive answers to both these questions. Schools that have gained experience with these new collaborative structures can now serve as models for others.

None of the structures described here could be termed a revolutionary departure from the traditional school organization. That is to say, principals still have ultimate authority to lead the schools and teachers still teach, for the most part, in their individual classrooms. Even if we view these new structures as merely alterations of the traditional one, the changes they introduce go far toward overcoming many of the latter's defects.

Those who propose these new structures leave no doubt that changes are mandatory if public education is to improve. "To put it bluntly," say Beatrice Ward and her fellow researchers at the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, "what we know about quality schools, about the characteristics of effective

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organizations, about the forthcoming replacement of teachers, and about the professionalization of teaching demands that such steps be taken. A school district that opts not to move in this direction will most likely make a major error."

Susan Rosenholtz points out that "the school's organizational conditions function either as a centripetal force pulling teachers to pursue common purpose or as a centrifugal force pushing teachers to pursue individual purpose." A major benefit of the structures reviewed below is that they enable teachers to work as a team. They make each school a community where the faculty works together on common goals.

The programs described here--categorized under school improvement and professional development--represent but a small sample of alternatives to the traditional school structure. Moreover, space does not permit giving attention to other areas in which educators are experimenting with alternative structures, such as peer evaluation, participative decision-making, and labor-management relations.

School Improvement as a Communal Responsibility

Strong support for involving teachers in school improvement is voiced by the Carnegie task force, which speaks of "the fundamental idea that the primary source of expertise for improving schools lies within" teachers.

> As the weight of the current bureaucratic environment is lifted and support staff take over many non-instructional tasks, professional teachers can concentrate on inspiring, coaching, guiding, and motivating students, and applying other resources, including technology, to the task of improving student learning. Teachers can help each other analyze student problems, work with parents, help students master particularly tough concepts, develop materials and curricula, organize the work of the support staff, hire new staff and decide how to allocate the budget among competing claims. Such schools will provide a greatly improved environment for teaching.

Lead Teachers

The initiative for these school improvement efforts would come, proposes the task force, from a group of "lead teachers" in each school. These experienced teachers would "guide and influence the activity of others, ensuring that the skill and energy of their colleagues is drawn on as the organization improves its performance." The task force realized that collegial relationships in a school's faculty do not just automatically happen. Someone must initiate efforts to "create communities," to get teachers to work together. Although lead teachers can perform this function, so, too, can principals.

Lead teachers play a critical role in the instructional improvement efforts of a consortium of Oregon school districts. The Valley Education Consortium, as described by Glen D. Fielding and H. Del Schalock, "is an organization of school districts, education service districts, a state-supported educational research and development agency, and a state college." The consortium follows a model of school improvement that "emphasizes the importance of developing and field testing instructional programs, systematically evaluating program costs and benefits, and using evaluation results to guide improvements."

The Valley Education Consortium involves lead teachers in development of the instructional programs.

> Many of the VEC lead teachers have been involved for five or six years in building and refining curriculum, test items, and other assessment procedures contained in VEC programs. They have done this both during the school year with released time furnished by their districts and during the summer. Lead teachers not only have drafted products, but have modified and extended them in view of critiques from both peers and experts in the field. They have gained invaluable insights about the nature of goal-based programs through this demanding development work.

Working with principals, lead teachers introduce the new programs to the remainder of the staff and help their colleagues to implement the programs. They also "assist in monitoring program implementation by administering questionnaires to their colleagues on the level of use of VEC programs." To prepare the lead teachers for their role of assisting their colleagues, school districts in the consortium provide released time for lead teachers to attend a "seminar that meets periodically throughout the school year."

School Improvement Teams

Additional models of school improvement that rely on collaboration and collegial relationships are

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This article is excerpted from a book, *Moving toward the Collaborative School*, by Stuart C. Smith and James C. Scott, forthcoming from the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, University of Oregon.

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also possible, as Ward and her colleagues report. They cite examples of improvement teams that "capitalize on the leadership that can be provided by a critical mass of teachers. A school improvement team in an elementary school, for example, consists of the school principal and four to six teachers." At a high school a leadership team of the principal, counselors, representative teachers, and other school staff "keeps track of the school as a whole." This and other improvement efforts in this school that involve teachers "have eliminated the need for department heads or assistant principals." Teachers in this school "also work with the principal to develop the school's annual budget and to hire new staff."

Ward and colleagues also describe a primary school that is one of six pilot schools in the National Education Association's "Mastery in Learning Project," launched in 1985. "It is a school-based, faculty-led approach to school improvement." The school is governed by a nine-member steering committee including the principal, a lead teacher, a teacher representing each grade level, and two other teachers who volunteered to serve on the committee because of their interest in the project. At the time Ward and her associates wrote their report, the steering committee had identified three improvement goals and was in the process of accomplishing them.

Program Evaluation by Teachers

At still another elementary school highlighted by these Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory researchers, "teachers play a major role in evaluating the education program of the school." Each year "the teachers establish objectives for improvement of the program" and then take steps to implement them. To make sure that the improvements will be made, the teachers use standardized and criterion-referenced test data (supplied by the district office) to monitor their students' academic achievement. "For example, when a new social studies program was adopted, the teachers wanted to know whether students acquired the new skills that the materials and strategies were to produce." The assistant superintendent's office analyzes the achievement data and provides the teachers with special reports that answer such questions.

Teachers as Professional Developers

One of the chief characteristics of a profession is that its members take on responsibility for their own professional development. The school must be structured in such a way, therefore, as to enable teachers to participate collegially in their professional growth.

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When the professionals in such a school design their development program, they may choose among a diverse set of models. Among the different types of programs that involve teachers in mutual efforts to improve their professional skills are peer observation, peer coaching, teacher centers in which expert teachers train other teachers, mentor teacher programs, and teacher support teams. Several of these approaches to collegial professional development are described in the following paragraphs.

Peer Observation

Research on effective schools has stressed the importance of regular observation of teachers' classroom performance. Teachers improve when they are observed and given feedback by someone who can identify and reinforce the teachers' strengths, discern their weaknesses, and assist them in carrying out an improvement strategy. Teachers can also learn from observing other teachers model their effective teaching. Little and Bird (1984) state that "observing and being observed, giving and getting feedback about one's work in the classroom, may be among the most powerful tools of improvement."

Although observation of teachers' classroom performance is traditionally handled by principals, time constraints and the problem of trust (principals decide whether teachers will be retained, promoted, and given tenure) prevent many principals from carrying out this role effectively. Jere E. Brophy suggests that, although any observer can provide feedback, peer observation seems to work best.

"Working as a group," says Brophy, "teachers not only get useful feedback relevant to their individual interests, but begin to work together, sharing expertise and observations and breaking down the isolation that so often is a barrier to professional development."

Peer observation has been used intermittently in a small number of schools for many years. Although the results have been mostly encouraging, various obstacles--chief among them the isolation and fragmentation fostered by the traditional school structure--have prevented the widespread implementation of this professional development model.

Today's renewal of interest in peer observation is a byproduct of the movement to professionalize teaching. Peer review is acknowledged to be the hallmark of a profession, whose practitioners monitor one another's performance. In fact, peer review is so essential to the reform of the teaching profession that it provides the best argument for renewing the school's structure: Whereas peer observation once was declared unworkable because it was at odds with the typical school's isolation of teachers and hierarchical authority structure, now reformers argue it is necessary to reshape the school's culture and structure to create a supportive environment for peer observation.

One model of collegial observation, advocated by Allan A. Glatthorn for "competent, experienced teachers," has the following features:

1. The relationship is moderately formalized and institutionalized. It is not simply an informal exchange of an occasional visit by two or more teachers who are close associates.
2. At a minimum the teachers agree to observe each other's classes at least twice and to hold conferences after those visits.
3. The relationship is among peers. Although an administrator or supervisor may be involved in organizing and occasionally monitoring the program, the observations, conferences, and discussions involve only teachers.
4. The relationship is nonevaluative. It is intended to complement, not take the place of, standard evaluation systems. None of the observation or conference data are shared with administrators or made part of the evaluation process.

Calling this program of peer observation "cooperative professional development," Glatthorn points out that it "can take many forms--from modest programs of two or three exchanges of observations to very ambitious and comprehensive projects in which teams of teachers collaborate in several aspects of the instructional function."

The collegial observation program described at length by Susan Stavert Roper and David E. Hoffman in the March 1986 OSSC Bulletin shares the four features recommended by Glatthorn.

Peer Coaching

One way to improve teachers' instructional effectiveness is to provide them with encouragement and technical assistance as they seek to make use of new knowledge and skills. This process, known as "coaching," has been studied by Beverly Showers and her colleagues at the University of Oregon. "There seems little doubt," says Showers, "that teachers can be trained to coach their peers in a school environment."

Glen D. Fielding and H. Del Schalock summarize Showers's research as follows: Six "peer coaches received eighteen hours of training . . . to increase their understanding of designated instructional models and ways they might be applied and adapted." These six teachers were also trained in the process of coaching. They then coached fifteen other teachers, observing and conferring with them weekly. In addition to supporting and encouraging the trainees, the coaches also gave technical advice, helped their trainees "determine where a model might best be applied," and adapted the models "to fit the characteristics of particular students."

According to Fielding and Schalock, the coaches "carried out their roles effectively" and "coached teachers used the new instructional models more skillfully and in more appropriate areas of learning than did partially coached or uncoached teachers."

Coaching benefits not only the trainees but the coaches themselves, a finding that led Showers to suggest that "all teachers should be peer coaches." She found that all the peer coaches in her study were regarded by their trainees as "helpful and professional in their conduct," regardless of the teachers' previous friendship patterns. Although several coaches expressed concern about being in a role that made them appear to be "superior" to their peers, they successfully overcame these anxieties.

Showers notes that teachers and administrators must be creative in organizing peer-coaching systems to free up teachers' time:

In schools where teachers already have preparation periods scheduled into their work days, teachers can be organized into coaching teams for collaborative planning and feedback sessions. Some schools have used specialist teachers to release teachers for observation periods, and some principals have taken classes in order to provide observation times for teachers. In other cases, teachers have had to video tape lessons for sharing at a later time when live observations could not be arranged. In the peer coaching study reported here, substitutes were provided for peer coaches one day per week in order for them to complete their observations and conferences.

All these strategies require the active support and involvement of building principals, she points out.

The peer coaches in Showers's study regarded their access to a consultant, through weekly staff meetings, as essential for their success. For this reason she recommends that districts provide some means of ongoing support and training for peer coaches. This training should focus on both the content they are seeking to share with their peers and on the process of coaching.

On-the-Job Training

In an address to the Fall 1985 Conference of the Council of the Great City Schools, Edward J. Meade, Jr., chief program officer of the Ford Foundation, argues that school officials must go beyond merely assigning responsibility for professional development to teachers.

It will not help matters to give teachers responsibility for their own development but deny them the time and resources to carry it out. Whether a program encompasses an entire district or a single school, it is the responsibility of school authorities, contends Meade, to create the context--structure, time, and resources--for teacher development to take place.

Pointing out that "hospitals require doctors to attend seminars on hospital time" and that "corporations provide--often mandate--education and training on-the-job for their executives," Meade argues that teachers should be allowed to carry out their development on "company time." New structures must be created so that teacher development can take place on the job as "a regular ongoing activity of a school."

Teacher Center with Expert Teachers

As an example of such structures, Meade points to Pittsburgh's Schenly High School Teacher Center, a "city-wide teacher development program" that is "akin to 'teaching hospitals' in the medical world." In this school "able and knowledgeable practitioners are engaged in guiding and assisting other practitioners to improve the practice of their particular craft."

Ward and her colleagues also highlight this creative program in the Pittsburgh public schools, noting that the center operates as a regular school staffed by teachers who "receive extensive training and practice in the principles of effective instruction. One third of the staff are *clinical resident teachers* who "teach students for approximately three hours a day and devote the remainder of the time to conducting model lessons and to planning with, observing, and coaching the center's 'visiting teachers'." These latter teachers--released from their regular assignments throughout the district--cycle in and out of the center on nine-week intervals. "Thus, the clinical resident teachers at the centers work with several teachers each year." Ward and colleagues state that the Schenley High School Teacher Center began in 1983, an elementary center began in 1985, and a middle school center "will be launched in the near future." At the elementary center visiting teachers serve four-week cycles.

Mentor Programs

An example of a teacher mentor program is Charlotte-Mecklenburg (North Carolina) School District's Teacher Career Development Program. This program, state Ward and colleagues, is founded on the premise that a teacher with 20 years of experience and advanced training is capable of performing more complex and different roles than a new teacher." Teachers in this district advance through three stages: provisional, career nominee, and career. Teachers at

the last stage who qualify on several criteria may apply to be "senior teacher mentors." Charged with coaching and advising provisional teachers, mentor teachers also serve on an "advisory/assessment team" that "conducts the formative and summative assessments of the provisional teacher's classroom performance."

Meade draws several conclusions about effective teacher mentor programs from the findings of a report on teacher development in schools recently prepared for the Ford Foundation by the Academy for Educational Development.

Common to the different kinds of mentor teachers described in the academy's report are these features:

- The mentor "is a peer of other teachers (we know from research that professionals of all kinds learn much of what they learn from peers)."
- The mentor "continues to teach (stays immersed in the 'real' school world)."
- The mentor "has a special responsibility which he/she must use to help others."
- The mentor "has the time and resources to carry out this assignment on-the-job."

Programs such as these that create different categories of roles for teachers are to be preferred, says Meade, over "master" teacher schemes that create a hierarchy of teachers.

Teacher Support Team

Another model for collegial professional development is the teacher support team, described by Arnold D. Sgan and J. Milford Clark as "a school-based cadre of professionals who provide systematic support and assistance to individual teachers."

These teams provide both one-on-one and group support, depending on the needs of the teacher receiving help. Sgan and Clark list the following activities that support teams can engage in:

- Assessing teachers and programs
- Observing teachers
- Meeting with teachers
- Providing feedback on teacher performance and programs effectiveness
- Conducting instructional planning sessions with teachers
- Developing and selecting materials and resources
- Helping to implement new ideas
- Initiating teacher and program improvement

"It is imperative that the principal be a member of the support team," state Sgan and Clark, so that the team will be sanctioned "as a legitimate structure for teacher supervision and support in the school." The team should also include a mentor teacher or someone of similar position, such as a department head. One or two other teachers, selected by peers, round out the team.

The principal coordinates the team by arranging its meetings and providing released time for members. "It is important to remember," state Sgan and Clark, "that classroom teachers must be the major decision-making group."

Conclusion

If many schools continue to be structured so that teachers work in isolation from one another--detached from school improvement efforts and uninvolved in one anothers' professional growth--it is not for lack of alternatives. Across the country educators have fashioned imaginative new structures that encourage teachers to work together, pooling their expertise toward such goals as developing new instructional programs, evaluating school outcomes, and improving their professional skills.

A major benefit of the models reviewed here is that they involve cooperation between teachers and administrators. Principals may work with teachers on school improvement teams or may encourage and support teachers' cooperative professional development. Whether they participate in these activities directly or not, their role in fostering a school climate that favors collegiality and norms of ongoing improvement is crucial.

Of course, these new structures in themselves will bring little improvement to schools unless the parties instituting them genuinely desire to relate to one another in constructive new ways. Administrators must convey to teachers that their professional judgment is respected and that their participation in school governance is desired. In turn, those teachers who have adopted a combative stance toward management must shed their hostility. Respect and cooperation must flow both directions.

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